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ABSTRACT

Seventy-five fifth grade students were administered an interest inventory to determine their attitudes toward reading and the kinds of reading materials they preferred. In addition, an observer completed reading behavior checklists for each student, and the students completed a second inventory to discover the amount of reading they did as opposed to other recreational activities. These data were then compared to records of books checked out by the children from their school library. The results indicated that the fifth grade students like to read a great deal and that they most enjoyed reading mysteries and humorous books. However, comics were the only reading materials most indicated having in their homes. Many of the students indicated that they were happy when reading, but few noted that they actually picked up a book during their free time. Talking, drawing, or playing games, respectively, were the preferences for leisure time activities. (Appendixes contain copies of instruments used in the study.) (FL)

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The Reading Attitudes and Interests of Fifth Graders

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Arts Degree in Reading Specialization at Kean College of New Jersey

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to survey the interest and attitudes of fifth grade students. Seventy-five students consisting of thirty-five boys and forty girls participated in the study.

An interest inventory and an observation checklist was administered to determine the students' attitudes toward reading and specifically what kind of reading materials they enjoyed reading the most. A second inventory was administered to determine the amount of reading done as opposed to other recreational activities.

The results show that students enjoyed reading but some preferred to do other things rather than to pick up a book and read for enjoyment.

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Teachers have been urged to discover and utilize the reading interests of their students to promote enthusiasm for learning (Witty, 1959, 1961; Purves and Beach, 1972). By discovering reading interests, it is hoped that teachers can encourage extra-curricular reading, thereby improving reading skills through this invaluable practice. Teachers should strive to encourage an interest in reading and what better way than to provide students with "interesting" books?

Interest plays a significant role in motivating a child to read, a conclusion reached in numerous research studies on children's reading interests. There is definite value in determining the reading interests of children as more teachers need to capitalize upon these interests for reading instruction as well as to provide their students with a wider variety of reading materials.

Research supports the idea that the kinds of stories found in basal reading series and the type of stories that intermediate grade children in America voluntarily choose to read do not concur (Bouchard 1971, Martin 1972). Meisel and Glass (1970) reported that a group of fifth grade boys indicated a strong interest in history, geography, and biographies; however, these areas of interest were not included in the basal reader that was being used in their school. Only one of the boys' top ten preferences, historical fiction, was included in the basal, whereas personal adventure, humor and fantasy, the girls' top three choices, were found in the basal reader.

The area of children's reading interests remains a vital research concern because of the relevance of reading interests to interest on reading. The necessity of beginning where a child is in terms of what he wants to read about is self evident. Carefully

executed studies of reading interests give teachers, librarians, and other educators a starting point when searching for materials.

Getzels (1966) identified the following four areas as ones in which research in reading interests was deficient: 1) precision of definition; 2) rigor of theory; 3) depth of analysis; and 4) exactness of observation. Zimet (1966) noted that often there were conflicting results given in studies done on reading interests. These she attributed to the use of dissimilar population samples and to different methods used in assessing children's interests. Townsend (1960) referred to the fact that when children were given check lists with general categories such as humor, it was not possible to know interests in the different varieties of humor. She also noted that the research pointed out that expressed interests were not always a guide to what children want to read about.

(Estes 1971, Huck 1973) Interest in the development and maintenance of positive attitudes towards reading is being voiced by classroom teachers, administrators, librarians and reading specialists as they seek to make reading a process that children will use throughout their lives. Attitudes play an extremely vital role in establishing this lifelong habit.

Several methods have been developed to aid teachers into how they assess children's feelings about reading. Observation has been beneficial to the classroom teachers. This can determine the strengths and weaknesses with a student in reading skills. Miller (1974) advocated observation as the first tool that should be used. Observation can also be useful in the affective realm, in diagnosing children's attitudes toward reading.

Tom Haladyna and Greg Thomas (1977) examined the attitudes of elementary school pupils for their grade level, sex and region. The findings revealed that elementary pupils attitudes are less positive as they go through grade levels. As a result, a decline in attitude toward school and school matter was noted. There was a sex difference effect noted which showed that boys' attitudes about school were more negative than that of girls.

Hypothesis

Although interest plays a significant role in motivating a child to read, attitude plays an extremely vital role in establishing reading as a process that children will use throughout their lives. It was hypothesized that pupils reading attitudes and interests show a strong relationship to the types of self-selected reading materials used.

Definition

Reading Attitude is a system of feelings related to reading which influence a student to approach or avoid a reading situation.

Reading Interest is the element of self involvement without pressure from outside; a spontaneous acceptance and an inner recognition of the appropriated (Spache, 1970).

Assumption and Limitations

That student interests can be accurately captured in a pencil and paper test. The use of only four fifth grade classes in a predominately Hispanic school in an urban area. The study will be limited because of the time allotment. Researcher will have to rely on the stated reading attitudes and interests of the students. Limited use of

the library due to its school scheduling.

Procedures

The subjects of this study were seventy-five fifth grade students in an urban disadvantaged elementary school in Jersey City. There were thirty-five boys and forty girls included. They were all from the same school and had attended there the previous school term.

The researcher administered an interest inventory and an observation checklist to determine the students attitudes toward reading and specifically what kind of reading materials they enjoyed reading the most.

A third inventory was administered to determine the amount of reading done as oppose to other recreational activities. The results were then tabulated to answer the questions on reading interest and attitudes.

The library media center which had just started in our school and in which children were being geared toward self-selected materials was utilized as well. A tabulation of all books which they had borrowed from the library over a span of two months was made. The librarian kept a tally sheet of all books which were checked out of the library by each student. The final analysis of study was a comparison of the student's interest as reflected in self-selected materials with those indicated as interest on the reading inventory.

Results

The results as shown in Table I pretain to the interest of the pupils toward reading. Over sixty-five (65.3) percent of the students in the sample indicated that they liked to read very much while the ones

who did not like to read at all was over four percent.

Table I

Response to "How Much Do You Like To Read?"

	Total Number	Percentage
Very Much	49	65.3
Quite a Lot	10	13.3
Not Very Much	13	17.3
Not at All	3	4.0
		99.9

In response to question two, the books which they enjoyed the most were mystery and comic and in response to question three analysis indicated that of the ones which they had at home, the majority of them named comics or stated there were no books in their home which they could read.

Only 3.6 percent had library cards as reported in response to question four whereas sixty-four percent stated they did not have one or had lost theirs.

Table II showed the ranking of the number of books which students had checked out of the library during the last month.

The results showed that only ten percent of the pupils had checked out five books from the library whereas eight percent had checked out only one books. The highest number in the table indicate that fifty percent had not checked out any books at all.

As indicated in question six, the students were to select the section of the newspaper which was of interest to them. Out of the

Table II

Number of Books Checked Out of the Library

Choice	Total Number	Percentage
0	38	50.67
1	6	8.0
2	4	5.33
3	4	5.33
4	5	6.67
5	8	10.67
8	4	5.33
10	2	2.67
12	4	5.33
		100.00

six sections mentioned only three were selected. 62.2 preferred the comics. The next highest choice was sports with 32 percent selecting this area as preferred and the news was preferred by only 5 percent of the sample. The remaining three areas had not been selected at all.

Question seven revealed differences in reading categories of both boys and girls. The results in Table III showed the reading interest categories rank ordered from the top ten most preferred to the ten least preferred of all.

Of the types of materials ranked, the category Mystery/Riddles was selected as the best liked, and the next category comic. Of the categories selected as being least preferred Humor ranked highest and next Horse/Autobiography next least preferred. The category Horse also

Table III

Reading Interest Categories

Rank Order

Order	Preferred	Order	Least Preferred
1	Mystery/Riddles	1	Humor
2	Comic	2	Horse/Autobiography
3	Adventure	3	Biography
4	Love/Fairy Tales	4	Fables
5	Art/Ghost	5	Geography/Motorcycle/Cars
6	Magazine	6	Hobbies/Religion
7	Fantasy	7	People
8	Family	8	Sports
9	Poetry	9	Poetry
10	Animal Stories/Horse Science	10	Family/Animals Stories/ Adventure/Science Fiction

was identified as the tenth of the preferred category. Poetry and Animal is found in both categories of preferred and least preferred.

Another area of interest in this study was an assessment of pupils' attitudes. For this purpose a checklist of observations by the teacher was used consisting of ten questions. The responses by the teacher indicated a mean of 3.78 yes answers.

The pupils' logs on the books selected at the library shows that the same types of books were selected as the ones which were ranked into categories in Table III.

Most of the students selected books on their level or of the

easy reading variety as identified by the teacher or librarian.

Conclusions and Implications

The results of this survey revealed fifth grade students liked to read very much. The books they enjoyed the most were mystery and humor but comics were the only book many of them stated as having in their homes.

The assessment of students' attitudes toward reading indicated that many of them appeared to be happy when engaged in a reading activity but picking up a book during free time to read rarely existed. Talking, drawing or playing a game was the preference among the students whereas reading a book had to be insisted upon by the instructor at the time for the students to do so.

The students had to be encouraged to realize that reading could be done for enjoyment and information as well as instructional purposes.

To implement the students attitudes and interests in reading the teacher along with the librarian must strive to instill in the students a positive attitude toward reading as well as an interest in reading for them to want to pick up a book to read for enjoyment rather than because it is an assignment or reading which had to be done.

Reading Attitudes and Interests:
Related Research

Although it is important to help children find reading material that is closely related to their present interests, it is also up to the teacher to broaden children's reading interests. Children's interests are not fixed; they change as children get older, and are susceptible to many environmental influences as well as the influence of the teacher. Children's reading interests can be improved and enriched in many ways (Harris, 1970). As stated by Harris (1962), children's reading can be improved by helping them to enjoy reading, by expanding the range of topics and variety of kinds of reading materials and by helping children move from less mature to more mature preferences and to recognize and prefer writing that has genuine literary worth.

Agin (1975) in an overview of research in reading, emphasized the importance of interests, attitudes and motivation. He/she maintained that the "attitude of the teacher is the main ingredient" in getting children to read. There is very little research literature on the relationship between pupils' attitudes toward and their achievement in reading, and almost no research at all on the effect the teacher attitudes have toward reading on the pupil attitudes and achievement.

The teacher must learn how best to counteract the attitude of the children that reading is for school only. Harris (1970; 452) stated that reading is a second-hand and, therefore, an inferior form of experience. Reading must be understood and interpreted as a tool of invention, relevance and creativity, as a sort of depth-perception device that gives dimension to first hand experience; and as a principal means by which the intellectual inheritance is tested and developed.

Langer (1970) was interested in learning about children's reading interests directly from the children themselves. A questionnaire

was administered to 264 fourth and fifth grade students. It was found that fifty-six percent of the high-achievers indicated that they prefer a library book whereas forty-five percent thought that the library books should be in the classroom. They also preferred books with comic strip format while the high achievers indicated they could read any book.

Norvell's study (1958) revealed that boys preferred reading about adventurous action, courage, heroism, humor, real people and animals; whereas girls favored adventure without violent action, mystery, love, home and school life, pets, patriotism, and sentiment.

King's research (1967) indicated that there are few sex differences in reading interests up to age nine but that differences in reading interests between girls and boys become evident after age eight. A study done in Canada by McKenzie showed that differences in reading interests between boys and girls appeared in fourth grade and increased appreciably in fifth grade.

Steiert (1966) found that girls read more books than boys. The girls chose fiction over nonfiction but boys chose nonfiction and fiction about equally. A difference was noted in categories of reading preferences between boys and girls as well as between fifth and sixth grade girls.

Attitudes play an extremely vital role in establishing a life-long habit (Estes 1971, Huch 1973). Interest as the development and maintenance of positive attitudes toward reading is being voiced by classroom teachers, administrators, and reading specialists as they seek to make reading a process that children will use throughout their lives.

Although teachers have been urged to discover and utilize the reading interests of their children to promote enthusiasm for learning,

it is also hoped that teachers can encourage extra-curricular reading, thereby improve reading skills through invaluable practice. Interesting books should be provided to encourage the students interest in reading (Witty, 1959, 1961; Purves and Beach, 1972).

Tom Haladyna and Greg Thomas (1977) examined the attitudes of elementary school pupils for their grade level, sex and region. Their findings showed that these pupils' attitudes are less positive as they go through grade levels. A decline toward school and school matter was noted. It was also revealed that boys' attitudes about school were more negative than that of girls. Haladyna maintained that since pupil attitudes have been declining, instructional programs must promote affective education, for attitudes and learning are related.

If a book or article has meaning, use and purpose for the individual, he/she will put forth the effort that reading demands. If his/her effort is rewarded by obtaining information or other desired satisfaction, his/her interest in reading will increase (Ruth Strang 1957).

The foregoing descriptions of children interests and their implications are of value to the teacher only as he/she put them to use in understanding his/her pupils' interests and guiding their reading in voluntary and schoolwork situations (Russell, 1949). The best way a teacher can stimulate interests in reading is by continued reference and possible sources in all his/her teaching and by showing his/her own interest and enthusiasm for reading. Developing reading interests and tastes is a complex task which cannot rely on any particular method or devices but must be based on the spirit of the whole instructional program.

The most important findings about reading interests is the tre-

mendous range of individual differences in the amount of voluntary reading and the specific interests that are expressed. In a group of children who are similar in intelligence, age and cultural background, the range of individual preferences is also tremendous. Although a knowledge of general trends is helpful to the teacher in allowing him/her to anticipate in interests of his/her pupils, it does not relieve him/her of the responsibility of trying to discover the particular interests of each pupil (Harris, 1970).

The Beta Upsilon Chapter, Pi Lambda Theta, conducted a survey of pupils reading interests as classified by age level. There were 811 respondents in the survey between the ages of seven and twelve. Carol Lauritzen and Deborah Cheves analyzed the responses by content (1974; 694). The findings were that most children liked books because of their content, girls liked the plot more so than boys. Most girls showed a great interest in people. The older children were more critical about what they didn't like about a book than younger ones. Animals were the most favored content by both boys and girls in all age groups but with a slight decrease at the eleven and twelve year old levels. Interest in mysteries grew from younger to older age groups whereas, science, sports and transportation were expressed as interest by boys than girls across all age levels. People and make-believe were favored by girls more than by boys.

An oral reading interest inventory was administered to approximately two thousand boys and girls in grades three to six in Connecticut by Wolfson, 1960. Twenty-five percent of the children returned questionnaires which parents had provided family background information. Of the twelve categories examined, boys' choices, as a group were

significantly different from girls' choice, except in social studies.

The area of children's reading interests remains a vital research concern because of the relevance of reading interests to interest in reading. Beginning where a child is in terms of what he wants to read about is self-evident. Studies of interests and preferences must be viewed from the standpoint of the method employed. Improvement in method and depth of analysis may well give more insightful and more dependable information. It becomes essential that each teacher identify the reading interests of children in his/her classroom and make more effort to supply the materials that fill these unique desires (Weintaub, 1969).

Shores, 1964, used an open-ended questionnaire to obtain data on the reference, informational and reading interests and needs of high school students. His findings revealed that youth do not want to ask about the same things they want to read about. The findings from similar technique covering grades four to twelve identified a strong interest in mystery and adventure throughout the grades as well as a declining interest in animal stories and a strong interest in reading about social studies that was underestimated by high school teachers. The results from both Wolfson (1960) and Shores' reading inventories indicated that this strength of interest was found in both boys and girls.

Research supports the idea that the kind of stories found in basal readers and the types of stories that intermediate graders in America choose to read do not concur (Bouchard 1971, Martin 1972), Meiser and Glass (1970) reported that a group of fifth grade boys showed a strong interest in history, geography, and biographies but these areas were not included in the basals being used in their school. Only one

of the boys' top ten preferences, historical fiction, was included in the readers. The girls' top three choices of personal adventure, humor and fantasy were found in the basals. While historical biographies and historic and geographic nonfiction were favorite interests for boys and girls, these categories were not included in the basals. Most basal series are weak in providing the kind of stories intermediate level children prefer to read.

A child's reading interests are only part of his/her pattern of interests. They are closely related to his/her other interests because of the kind of child he/she is and because reading is often contributed to other interests. Children's interests may vary from person to person and may shift for any one person, but they do constitute an important source of motivation for much school learning.

Children with parents who show a highly positive attitude toward reading and who read to their children profit from instruction when they begin to read and they also enjoy considerable success (Durkin, 1966; McCormack, 1977). A review of current research indicates that there is little information available which demonstrates how school-age children as well as adults say they feel about reading. Zirkel and Green (1976) suggested that "there is a paucity of verbal self-report instruments in the reading attitude assessment area" (p. 107).

Parker (1978) used an objectively scored interview specifically designed to compare attitudes toward reading among students in grades two through six in an elementary school in east Tennessee. The teachers selected students who were among the ten best or the ten weakest readers in their class.

The students in Parker's study were poor readers and from a

lower socioeconomic strata. The others were from homes of average income families and only a few from high income homes. In her findings there were no significant differences in attitudes toward reading between groups of "good" (N=60) and "weak" (N=60) readers.

Conclusions based on a review of these results indicated that children in earlier grades might tend to maintain positive attitudes toward reading despite evident difficulties with learning to read.

Because we are inundated with a tremendous amount of printed material daily, we can quickly become satiated and take for granted what reading is and how we do it. If reading would vanish as a form of communication and the written word fade from view we may rarely think what it might be. The experienced reader is trained in decoding skills and read for comprehension while it takes the young children in primary grades a few years to develop these developmental skills.

If these skills continue unknowing through the years a casual attitude toward reading can occur which could cause these learners never to become skilled in critical and effective readers. In order for the teaching of reading to count, negative attitudes toward this potent skill must be changed.

Through self-examination and a renewed sensitivity to the intricacies of reading, the learner's attitudes will improve and a meaningful change will result within the reading program.

There is evidence to suggest that reading done in childhood builds attitudes that persist throughout a lifetime, often because they are unconscious attitudes. The emotional attitudes of older members of the family toward books and reading have a great impact on younger children reading attitudes.

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Appendix A

Name_____ Grade_____

INTEREST INVENTORY

1. How much do you like to read?

   Very much_____

   Quite a lot_____

   Not very much_____

   Not at all_____

2. What are the titles of books which you really enjoyed?

   _____

3. What are the titles of some of the books in your home?

   _____

4. Do you have a library card?

   _____

5. How many books have you checked out from the library during the last month?

   _____

6. What part of the newspaper do you like to read best?

   Comic section_____

   Sports section_____

   News section_____

   Editorials_____

   Letters to the editor_____

   Society section_____

7. What magazine do you read regularly?

   _____

8. What type of comic books do you enjoy reading?

_____

9. What are the names of your two favorite television programs?

_____

10. What do you usually do after school?

_____

11. What do you really like to do after school?

_____

12. What kind of hobbies do you have?

_____

Appendix B

Name_____

Put a 1 by all of the types of books you like best, 2 by the kinds you like next best and an X by those you don't like.

___ Adventure
___ Animal stories
___ Hobby stories
___ Biography
___ Autobiography
___ Science
___ Western stories
___ Sports
___ Fairy tales
___ Poetry books
___ Mystery
___ Motocycles and Minibikes
___ Love and Romance
___ Science fiction
___ Car magazine
___ Horse stories
___ Humor
___ Fantasy
___ History
___ Geography
___ Fables and Myths
___ Art and Music
___ Religion
___ People of other lands
___ Newspaper
___ Magazines
___ Comic books
___ Ghost
___ Family stories
___ Riddles and Jokes

Appendix C

Observation checklist to assess reading attitudes

	Yes	No
1. Seemed happy when engaged in reading activities?	___	___
2. Volunteered to read aloud in class?	___	___
3. Read a book during free time?	___	___
4. Mentioned reading a book at home?	___	___
5. Chose reading over other activities (playing games, coloring, talking, etc.)	___	___
6. Made requests to get to the library?	___	___
7. Checked out books at the library?	___	___
8. Talked about books he/she had read?	___	___
9. Finished most of the books he/she had started?	___	___
10. Mentioned books he/she had at home?	___	___